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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001990

SIPDIS

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

DEPT FOR SA/INS FROM AMBASSADOR WILLS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10-24-12

TAGS: AMGT CE

SUBJECT: OFFICIAL INFORMAL NUMBER 148 (10-24-02)

Classified by DCM Lewis Amselem, Reasons 1.5 (b, d)

CONTENTS: GAYOOM VISIT
RODRIGO RECALL
ICC

GAYOOM VISIT

11. (C) We have the following points for you to use regarding President Gayoom's request for a meeting with President Bush:

-- In his almost 25 years in power, President Gayoom has been very friendly to the U.S., and the Maldives has consistently used OIC, UN, and other fora to stake out moderate positions.

-- Under Gayoom, the Maldives has been an eager member of the international coalition against terrorism, immediately condemning the September 11 terrorist attacks and offering the U.S. any help it needed. (Note: This may not seem like much now months after the horrendous event, but right after September 11 it was something that was deeply appreciated.)

-- After September 11, for example, Gayoom allowed U.S. forces blanket overflight and ship clearances. This was important as the Maldives lies due north of the U.S. base at Diego Garcia.

-- The Maldives could prove similarly helpful if military action against Iraq proves unavoidable.

-- As far as we are aware, no Maldivian leader has ever met with a U.S. President since the country gained independence from the UK in 1965. In the run-up to the Gulf War, then-Secretary Baker briefly stopped in Male to rally support. That was apparently the highest level contact between the two countries. As a friendly country, the Maldivians -- in requesting a high-level meeting -- clearly want to upgrade ties.

-- Given these factors, we think that a meeting between Gayoom and President Bush deserves very serious consideration. If the President is not available, we would then suggest a meeting with the Vice President.

-- While we understand that a meeting may not be possible, we guarantee that the Maldivians -- who do not request much from us -- will be hurt if we do not come up with a good reason for a turn down of its request. Any hint that we are giving short shrift to the Maldives because it is a small state will be noticed and resented.

(POL)

RODRIGO RECALL

12. (U) Per your o/i note, we have requested the dipnote from the MFA withdrawing Nihal Rodrigo's name. (POL)

ICC WAIVER

13. (C) You'll see our front channel report on the latest twist and turn in the ICC saga. The MFA continues to put on the stall. Let us know ASAP Washington's views on the latest proposal from the MFA; meanwhile, we're going to take it up at the political level again. (DCM)

WILLS